English Valleys Elementary School

Principal:
"Professional Development (as structured by the IPDM) has changed the culture of the school. People think the PD is more relevant and interesting – can't complain because we're designing it."

Implementation of the Iowa Professional Development Model

A. Description of District

The English Valleys School District serves pre kindergarten through 12th grade in two buildings—one elementary (PreK – 6) and one secondary (7-12). Forty-four students are enrolled in the pre-kindergarten program, 226 students in grades K-6, and 244 students in grades 7-12. The student population served is rural and white.

A. About the District
B. Applying the Operating Principles
C. Professional Development Cycle
D. Observations About the Site Visit

The English Valleys Elementary School was one of the sites who attended (with their AEA representatives) the Department of Education's orientation to and initial training in the Iowa Professional Development Model. During interviews, several teachers commented that the early introduction to the PD model had helped them design several model components previously absent in their PD program.

Site Visit

Department of Education staff visited English Valleys Elementary school on October 26, 2005. The principal (who also serves as the district Curriculum Director) was interviewed as well as individual teachers. We met with the Leadership Team and visited all classrooms in the building, observing lessons for evidence of implementation of the schools professional development content.

Note: The story mask photo (above) and book signing photo (page 2) are from
http://www.english-valleys.k12.ia.us/pages/elementary.html

B. Iowa Professional Development Model: The Operating Principles

Focus on Instruction

Teacher: "[PD] helps us keep the same goal and provides accountability across the whole faculty."

English Valleys Elementary School has a clear focus on curriculum and instruction. During the past few years, the school has aligned its curriculum with the district's standards, engaged in professional development on instructional strategies for reading, served as a test site for AEA9's pilot of the *Instructional Decision Making (IDM)* process for addressing the needs of struggling students, and has adopted a new reading series (Harcourt's *Trophies)*.

Participative Decision Making

The Professional Development Leadership Team includes the principal, teacher representatives, AEA consultants and one external consultant who works with faculty weekly on reading strategies and the use of the new reading series. The team meets monthly to examine student data and plan the monthly staff development session. In some cases, this group solves problems as a team while in other cases issues are presented to the entire faculty for resolution. Currently the Leadership Team is addressing the issue of implementation and how to study it. In the past, when teachers were learning reading strategies, logs were completed by all teachers to document use of the strategies. With the advent of the new reading series, however, logs have for the moment been discontinued.

A major issue addressed and solved by this team has been finding time for teacher collaboration and peer coaching. Team meeting time has been provided by using large-group instructional activities for students as well as during the seven days of PD provided by the district.

Simultaneity

.Adopting a new reading series and implementing *Instructional Decision Making* in the same year has proved challenging for the staff. While training continues on instructional strategies, it appears that the bulk of collaborative time is spent on the new initiatives. The principal and leadership team are sensitive to the fact that teachers presently have a full plate.

Leadership

The principal of English Valleys Elementary School is a strong and active instructional leader. She attends training with her staff, initiates changes for which she sees a need, conducts regular walk-throughs in classrooms, and is knowledgeable about the PD content that is the school's current focus.

Teacher (re: leadership team): "The leadership team has been great to get external support—professional people who know. We want external expertise; we're never too old or too wise."

The Reading Leadership Team collects and analyzes data and plans professional development for the school, including agendas for the seven day-long sessions (part of which are planned and

conducted with the high school). Several teachers expressed appreciation for the team's work in providing collaborative time and external consultant assistance.

Leadership Team minutes from last spring included a proposal to increase the ratio of classroom teachers on the team as a vehicle for increasing teacher commitment to the PD program.

An Intervention Team also collects and examines data on specific students and shares those data with building staff for their use in the design of interventions.

C. The Professional Development Cycle
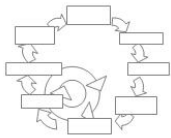
As is true of all the schools and districts implementing the Iowa Professional Development Model, English Valleys Elementary School addressed some components of the PD cycle more thoroughly than others.

Collecting and Analyzing Student Data

English Valleys Elementary School collects data from several sources on student reading readiness and skills, including ITBS (grades 2-6), Correct Word Sequence, DIBELS (grades 2-6) and Measures of Academic Progress (grades 2-6). While the district is generally high achieving, data are examined for individual students to identify existing or potential reading problems. Data are used to develop specific interventions for struggling students and to drive the PD program in general. Teachers in collaborative meetings share data and discuss findings and trends with comfort. The use of data to drive instruction appears to be well integrated into the processes of this school.

Goal Setting

The English Valleys' 2005-2006 district reading goal states:

> Students will show progress in reading in grades 4, 8, and 11 using the following indicators:
> - Iowa Tests of Basic Skills/Iowa tests of Education Development
> - State trajectory for reading achievement.

Specifically for the elementary school, the goal is to increase the percentage of students in grades 1-3 who read independently at grade level as measured by the Diagnostic Reading Assessment and the percentage of students in grades 4-6 who read fluently as measured by DIBELS.

Selecting Content

Although English Valleys Elementary School is not a "Reading First" school, it has engaged in training for the past three years in the same content (Think Alouds, Read Alouds, Talk Alouds, Readers Theater, etc.). Training has been provided by AEA 9 until this year, when a private consultant formerly with AEA 9 now provides follow-up training.

4th grade team (re: focus of PD under IPDM): "The team approach is better. A lot of PD in the past was disjointed, now we're more coordinated, more tied together across the curriculum."

As a result of a curriculum alignment last year, the school adopted a new reading series believed to align more closely with the districts standards (Harcourt's *Trophies)* and the implementation of this curriculum has become the focus for PD this year. Teachers have felt challenged by the implementation of the new series and several commented to us that using the new materials was time consuming.

The Leadership Team examined the research base underlying the new curriculum and has suggested sharing an executive summary of that research with all faculty to increase teachers' confidence in the program. The *Trophies* series incorporates many of the instructional strategies that teachers have learned through PD during the past three years.

Designing Process for Professional Development

The English Valleys District has provided two training days prior to the beginning of school for all district teachers, three day-long training session during the school year (October, December, and January) and three early release days for learning opportunities. Teacher collaborative teams meet on a weekly basis and building level meetings provide additional training and planning time. AEA 9 has served as the PD provider for English Valleys.

On-Going Cycle

Collaboration and Implementation   All faculty are members of collaborative teams that meet weekly (Fridays during a large group instructional setting for students) and monthly during regularly scheduled PD sessions. Teachers consistently reported that the work of collaborative teams was productive. During these sessions, student data are examined, lessons are planned and problems are discussed and solved. It was unclear if there was a school-wide agenda for these sessions or if each team set its own agenda. It was also unclear whether minutes were recorded for these sessions.

The study of implementation has suffered this year, as the documenting of practice of instructional strategies has been discontinued. Teachers have agreed, however, to follow the suggestions for implementation in their new reading series, which incorporates several of the strategies they have learned. Teachers are definitely attempting to implement the new series as designed. Currently, the implementation plan for reading is the Harcourt recommendations for the *Trophies* series.

Principal (re: collaboration): "I don't see people hiding in their classrooms anymore – people are more apt to share things about practice and not just about kids. Now I can ask people to share when I see good things in the classrooms and people are willing to share their craft."

Sp Ed Teacher (re: collaboration): "It's been nice to watch the staff become a collective staff – not 'my kids and your kids'—now we work together for all the kids."

The implementation of IDM is documented in minutes of meetings, intervention plans and the frequent administration of "probes" – mini-tests of skills being taught and measured.

Formative Data Collection   Reading data collected at various intervals during the year include measures of Phonemic Awareness in grades K-2; Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) in grades 1-3; Correct Word Sequence, Measures of Academic Progress in grades 2-6; and DIBELS (fluency) in grades 2-6.

Teacher (re: data): "Studying data about kids helps me focus and causes me to examine my own practice, attack what needs to be done – it's made a difference."

Summative Data

As is true of all Iowa Schools, ITBS and ITED (high school) data are analyzed to determine program efficacy. Students scoring below the 41st percentile in reading and math are judged to be non-proficient by Iowa standards. During the 04-05 academic year, reading proficiency rates for English Valleys Elementary School were: 71% for 2nd grade; 86% for 3rd grade; 83% for 4th grade, 88% for 5th grade; and 69% for 6th grade.

External Technical Assistance

General technical assistance and specific training have been provided by consultants from AEA 9. In the current year, an external consultant, previously with AEA 9, is assisting the school with its reading initiatives.

Teacher: "Child study teams now focus on techniques and methods instead of discussing one child. We've moved from how to fix the kids to how do we fix the way we teach kids. We've reduced our numbers in special education."

D. Some Site Visit Observations

With the exception of a formal implementation plan and a process for studying implementation, English Valleys Elementary has all the elements of the IPDM in place. Interviews confirmed that their early participation as a test site for the IPDM helped the school in their design of IPDM components.

While all teachers interviewed mentioned the additional work required to implement the new reading series, teachers were positive about their professional development program. Many felt that the development of functioning collaborative teams had reduced the stress of learning and using new knowledge and skills and had in fact changed the entire culture of their school.

Teacher: "PD used to be random, unconnected. Now we know what our goal is and we work to attain it and I can use the PD."

We would recommend the development of a formal implementation plan. What is the reading program expected to look like? How will you know when you have achieved implementation? How do teachers receive feedback on any discrepancies between their teaching of reading and the expected program of instruction? Without implementation data it is very difficult to analyze current practice, e.g., the relative emphases on vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension instruction.

If minutes of collaborative team meetings are not recorded and collected, we would recommend this practice. The Leadership Team could analyze how team time is spent and provide feedback and suggestions to the faculty regarding optimal use of collaborative team time. While there is no "right answer" regarding the allocation of team time to various tasks, we wondered if perhaps the implementation of IDM had absorbed disproportionate amounts of the time available for planning and other tasks.

As you examine your array of formative measures it might be useful to determine if your instruments are providing the data most relevant to your goals. For example, if reading comprehension is your primary goal, are you receiving timely information on student progress in reading comprehension? While vocabulary knowledge and fluency are correlates of reading comprehension, measures of vocabulary and fluency alone will not provide sufficient information on student ability to derive meaning from text.